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DECEMBER 15, 2023 | VOLUME 14 | ISSUE 26

YOUR PURCHASE BENEFITS THE VENDORS.
PLEASE BUY ONLY FROM BADGED VENDORS.

Fuller Bridge sweep reiterates need
for shelter space. **Page 4**

SHAWN
SWOFFER
#574



ASK YOUR
VENDOR:
**WHAT'S THE
BEST CHRIST-
MAS SONG?**

GROUND COVER

NEWS AND SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUND UP | WASHTENAW COUNTY, MICH.



THIS PAPER WAS BOUGHT FROM



@groundcovernews, include vendor name and vendor #

groundcover news

GIFT GUIDE

It's the gift-giving time of the year! The holiday season is the perfect time to get something unique and meaningful for the people you care about while also making a difference by supporting artists and makers in the community. Or, better yet, treat yourself to one of these awesome items!

PALMS to POETRY

Teresa Basham, Groundcover vendor No. 570, released her second collection of poetry "Palms to Poetry" was released in mid-December. Find her selling Groundcover News on Liberty St. and inquire about purchasing this new book or her first book "Poems to Poetry" — or both for a discounted rate!

GROUNDCOVER NEWS
BRACELETS and EARRINGS

Roberto Isla Caballero, Groundcover vendor No. 347, handmakes jewelry so that customers can show the world how much they love Groundcover News! Find him on the corner of Washington and Main Street in downtown Ann Arbor to see his collection available for purchase.

2023 GROUNDCOVER
MAGAZINES

Groundcover News released two magazines this year with timeless content about people in our community — Exceptional Community Member Edition and Vendor Voices.

THE FOLD: a COLLECTION of
POETRY

"The Fold" is a work of poetry written by Groundcover writer La Shawn Courtwright. It can be ordered online at blackstonebookstore.com (web shop of BlackstoneYpsilanti Bookstore and Cultural Center).

KUNG FU PANDA'S
ARTWORK and JEWELRY

Cindy is a happy-go-lucky creative artist and Groundcover vendor who sells at the Sweetwaters Cafe on Washington St. in downtown A2. You can purchase Cindy's art by attending a showing at the Groundcover News office. Email contact@groundcovernews.com if interested to schedule a date and time to shop in person.



Cartoon by Izzy Hedin-Urrutia

PROVIDING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF-DETERMINED INDIVIDUALS IMPACTED BY POVERTY, PRODUCING A STREET NEWSPAPER THAT GIVES A PLATFORM TO UNDERREPRESENTED VOICES IN WASHTENAW COUNTY, PROMOTING AN ACTION TO BUILD A JUST, CARING AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY.

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ASK YOUR VENDOR

What's the best
Christmas song?

"Silent Night" by the
Temptations.
— Shawn Swoffer, #574

Hallelujah Requiem.
— Cindy Gere, #279

"This Christmas" by the
Whispers.
— Pony Bush, #305

"Feliz Navidad" by Jose
Feliciano.
— Roberto Isla Caballero, #347

Nutcracker soundtrack, if any-
thing. I don't really listen to
Christmas music but classical
stuff is okay.
— James Manning, #16

I have so many its difficult to
select ... "Ain't that A-Rockin?"
is a simple, beautiful depiction
of Mary and her just-born Son.
Their innocence contrasts the
cruelty of this world.
— Amanda Gale, #573

"This Christmas" by Donny
Hathaway.
— Mike Jones, #113

"Grandma Got Run Over by a
Reindeer."
— Jim Clark, #139



Getting through the holidays

For those who have lost loved ones, the holidays sometimes can be sad.

Family holiday occasions, too, can sometimes be difficult and sad for everyone — homeless or not, especially for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer community.

A solution?

"Those of us, because we're at a University, we educate people," said Dr. Brenda Riemer, a professor of sports management at Eastern Michigan University. Riemer, who gave a lunchtime presentation for the College of Health and Human Services on Nov. 7 discussing transgender women in sports, was advocating for a future where everyone is able to participate.

The mission statement of Groundcover News states, in part, "to promote action to build a just, caring and inclusive society in Washtenaw County."

Riemer's quote is out of context, but the solution of teaching, caring and inclusiveness is part of each day at Groundcover — not just the holidays.

There is a Jewish prayer that



JANE REILLY
Groundcover vendor No. 611

turns grieving into a proactive process.

"If the desire to continue a relationship with the departed impels you to learn something you otherwise would not have learned, do a mitzvah [good deed] you otherwise would not have done or go higher and further than ever before, then that soul lives on in you."

Becky Sehenuk Waite of Ann Arbor and the Sehenuk family are an example of this prayer in action. They created jennysehenuk.com and Jenny Sehenuk Day, Oct. 10, in remembrance of Becky's twin sister, Jenny, 29, of Santa Clarita Valley, California, who died in a motorcycle accident on Oct. 10,

2010.

Clever signs are posted annually around Ann Arbor and wherever there are Sehenuk friends. For example, "Jenny Sehenuk counted to infinity. Twice," and "If you spell Jenny Sehenuk in Scrabble, you win. Forever."

Why is Jenny Sehenuk, pronounced see-hen-nook, important?

Let's allow Sehenuk to answer for herself from jennysehenuk.com:

"We're all the same in one way or another," Sehenuk said.

Sehenuk Waite knows if you spell love in Scrabble you spell Jenny Sehenuk. Love wins. Forever.

A holiday gift for the Sehenuk Family and all Groundcover readers: Paul McKenna has a free online video called "I Can Make You Happy," which is hypnotism with subliminal messages that make you more cheerful. Two other free internet companies, Vortex Success and 30 Minute Mindset, have scripts so you can read the offered subliminal messages. Spirit Tribe Awakening is free, peaceful and powerful music. Peace on Earth, Good Will to All.

From the desk of Panda: Loneliness epidemic and how to beat it

When my child Denali told me there was a loneliness epidemic, it blew my mind away. What I do know is that the truth is elusive. The COVID epidemic could not have helped and I think it's part of the issue. It was well-documented in the 1950s into the 80s that isolation is detrimental to human health, mental stability and well-being. What the pandemic did was isolate and demoralize people, and led the human mind into self-sabotage. It put people into a state where their fear is paralyzing. One of the only groups that got mega-paid was psychiatric counselors and therapists. The result was more pills and more dizzy brains.

There are states of control that amount to a psychological cycle of abuse. And for some people, they could not get out of it after the pandemic. They're still in that "catatonic" state of feeling. We have to try and shake off loneliness and fear, and seek out people who are able to help us in letting go.



CINDY GERE
Groundcover vendor No. 279

What is the opposite of loneliness?

Honest, wholesome human engagement and lots and lots and lots of hugs

Some people choose to be alone but this is not loneliness per se. I am a rather solitary person myself but it's a personal choice. I have many buddies to call and hang out with.

Here are my ways to combat loneliness:

1. Join a yoga class.
2. Contact an old, good buddy and hang out in person.

3. Help at the local dog shelter.
 4. Help the homeless community by volunteering
 5. List all the things you want to do and join an online group of people who share one of your interests. I always wanted to go ghost hunting or take a CPR class.
 6. Join an event-planning group such as the Fourth of July parade committee or the Ann Arbor powwow planning committee. Or any of the groups or activities listed in the Crazy Wisdom magazine
 7. Environmental issues are huge. Create a clean-up group in areas around Ann Arbor that need help, such as bike paths, highways and under bridges.
 8. Join a meditation group and/or karate class.
 9. For me, getting outside is what helps eliminate loneliness.
- When I was in high school we used to have huge parties and just hug all our buddies. Start a hug fest. A good old hug can kick the blues away for the day!

GROUNDCOVER NEWS

Groundcover News, a 501(c)(3) organization, was founded in April 2010 as a means to empower low-income persons to make the transitions from homeless to housed, and from jobless to employed.

Vendors purchase each copy of our regular editions of Groundcover News at our office for 50 cents. This money goes towards production costs. Vendors work selling the paper on the street for \$2, keeping all income and tips from each sale.

Street papers like Groundcover News exist in cities all over the United States, as well as in more than 40 other countries, in an effort to raise awareness of the plight of homeless people and combat the increase in poverty. Our paper is a proud member of the International Network of Street Papers.

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Size	Black/White	Color	Dimensions (W x H in inches)
1/8	\$110.00	\$150.00	5 X 3 or 2.5 X 6.5
1/6	\$145.00	\$200.00	5 X 4
1/4	\$200.00	\$265.00	5 X 6.25
1/2	\$375.00	\$500.00	5 X 13 or 10.25 X 6.5
full page	\$650.00	\$900.00	10.25 X 13

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Fuller Bridge sweep reiterates need for shelter space

In 2019 I experienced homelessness and was living in the Delonis Center where I met my friend Tom (not his real name). Tom was a homeless schizophrenic who was sleeping under the Fuller Bridge located by the University of Michigan hospital. I slept there a few times. The tent was set up on concrete with bricks to hold down the corners. We slept on air mattresses to protect ourselves from the hard ground. They were comfortable until they sprang leaks. The train's roar as it passed under the bridge was startling and deafening. We woke in the morning to the sounds of rush hour traffic and went to the nearby St. Andrews Church/soup kitchen for breakfast.

Near the bridge are other encampments. Located in the trails and woods, the remnants of many generations of homeless citizens can be found. I once walked among the refuse. In it, I found things that were once important to someone: nice clothing, tons of personal hygiene items, bikes, camping gear and more, all in usable condition and simply left behind. Some things were deteriorated due to time. It was easy to see how long these places have been used out of desperate need for shelter.

Campsites like these are located all over Washtenaw County. There are popular ones that many people know about and use frequently. The Washtenaw County agency PATH (Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness) places people in some of these sites. Still, most folks find them on their own, by word of mouth, or through community action groups like Washtenaw Camp Outreach. Sometimes they are on Department of Transportation property, sometimes on university property, and sometimes on private property. This is because there are no sanctioned and accessible places to camp or sleep when you have no permanent shelter.

The Delonis Center is very limited in capacity, given the size of the homeless population. There are no other shelters open year-round for single adults. Sleeping in tents is the closest thing some people have to safe, habitable shelter. Habitable means safe from cold and environmental hazards like bugs and animals. However, in a tent that is at a known location, personal safety from crime and violence cannot be guaranteed. This means tents are not adequate shelter. After an encampment has been noticed by the police or other authorities, they may take action by forcing camp-dwellers to move in what is known as a "sweep." Sweeps take away even the minimal safety of a tent.

People are often forced to abandon their property, including their tents and



JIM CLARK
Groundcover vendor No. 139

bedding, leaving them no shelter. Because they have nowhere to go, the campers regroup under different bridges or return to the same one after some time has passed. Eventually, the sweep comes around again. Sweeps at Fuller Bridge have happened many times over the years.

The most recent time the Fuller Bridge camp was swept was November 7, 2023. This time the sweep was initiated by the Michigan Department of Transportation at the behest of Amtrak. According to the officials who conducted the sweep, the decision-makers for Amtrak were afraid for the safety of their passengers. The MDOT officials also had concerns for the safety of the trains and crews, about the fires campers lit for warmth, but also for the campers themselves.

Consider the following quote from the April 2023 revision of the "Trespass & Suicide Prevention Tool Kit" (<https://trespasstoolkit.fra.dot.gov/eLib/>) which outlines an action plan for relocating homeless individuals from train tracks to a safer location. However, the approach is flavored by forcible removals, surveillance, and a tone of "homeless people are a nuisance."

"... in California's Santa Barbara County, a 2019 investigation found that a surge in rail-related deaths was tied to individuals living in encampments near the ROW. Twelve of 20 people killed over four years had been living in encampments, and more than half of these deaths were suicides. Encampments close to the tracks can also cause undue stress for train crew members who witnessed a previous train strike."

Groundcover News editor Cynthia Price was with the residents right before the November sweep, bringing them supplies. She shared with me what the residents said to her about it. "[They] sounded nonchalant and unthreatened, which seemed counterintuitive. They said MDOT bulldozed everything." What the resident meant by that is they used a Bobcat to doze under all their stuff at the bridge. "But they let [a couple of us] take some of our stuff because we were there after we got the notice. They didn't bulldoze our bikes," said



Demolished tent underneath Fuller Bridge after November 7 sweep.

one of the residents.

As this was happening the Ann Arbor police also came on the scene. The AAPD tends to be sympathetic toward the unsheltered people in Washtenaw County. They know where the encampments are and who sleeps in them, and they prefer not to disturb them unless duty calls. In this case, they let the residents know they would have not made them leave. They helped, and told the residents, "If it was up to us we wouldn't do it, but we have to abide by MDOT."

The residents left the camp; they waited until later that night and went back.

Price said, "It's always been my impression that sweeps were a lot less drastic than you would think. A lot of times people just go back right away. Also, some sweep notifications don't get acted on. In my view, it makes a difference in terms of where the population is and where they are relocated. Personally, this sweep meant it was slightly more dire to make sure they were warm enough. They had fires, which is one of the things MDOT was concerned about. Washtenaw Camp Outreach brought them propane and heaters but there were still fires before and after. Cold is a lot more serious when your only option for shelter is in a tent outside."

People who are homeless seek shelter in tents, cars, abandoned buildings, parks and under bridges and awnings.

These places will continuously be sought unless we make a place of respite for unsheltered people. If the citizens of Washtenaw County want to see homelessness reduced and eliminated, then we need to do more than observe the problems. We need solutions and plans to go with them.

As reported in Groundcover News frequently this fall, Shelter Now is a community action group that has some ideas. Sparked by the sweep at 16 S. Washington this past summer, Shelter Now was born from a body of activists and neighbors who responded by blockading the sweep. Shelter Now's goal is to have these demands met by the county or in other ways:

- 1) Create and fund a dignified 24/7 shelter in Ypsilanti before spring 2024;
- 2) Open a temporary shelter immediately. Fund and do not interfere with unofficial and temporary shelter spaces. End street sweeps and camp sweeps;
- 3) Ensure that the houseless and housing-insecure communities have decision-making and veto power in all Ypsilanti shelter spaces and their creation.

Homelessness is not going away anytime soon. Neither is the winter weather, nor are the deaths by cold exposure. So neither are these demands. They will be made again and again until the county listens and responds affirmatively. No justice, no peace.

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There are potential issues with Ann Arbor's public bathroom pilot

Public bathrooms are crucial for everyone, but for those without a stable place to live, they can be a source of worry and stress. Imagine not having a bathroom to use whenever you need it — this is the reality for many homeless individuals.

One big concern is just finding a bathroom that's open and nearby. Homeless people often struggle to locate clean and safe bathrooms and sometimes have to plan their day around finding a place to use the restroom.

Cleanliness is a huge issue, too. Not all public bathrooms are well-maintained, and this can make homeless individuals worried about getting sick or catching infections. Sometimes, there's no soap, toilet paper or even running water, which makes staying clean difficult.

Privacy is also important. Imagine using a bathroom with no proper locks or partitions. For homeless folks, this lack of privacy can make them feel exposed or uncomfortable.

Feeling safe in a public bathroom is another worry. Sometimes these places can be dangerous because of



JULIANO SANCHEZ
Groundcover vendor No. 174

other people hanging around. There's a fear of being harassed or even attacked which adds stress to an already tough situation.

So it's not just about convenience for homeless individuals. It's about finding a safe, clean and private place to take care of basic needs. Making sure there are better options for them could really make a difference in their lives.

On November 6, 2023, Ann Arbor approved a public bathroom initiative that could potentially solve these issues. ([Visit a2gov.org/news/pages/article.aspx?i=1010](https://www.a2gov.org/news/pages/article.aspx?i=1010)). The ability to access the Throne public

bathrooms will help alleviate some of the pressure placed on local businesses to provide publicly accessible restrooms to the homeless population.

However, one concerning detail is that the restrooms are stated to be accessible by scanning a QR code or by using a mobile app — something that some people who are unhoused or sight- or mobility-challenged may not possess, or feel comfortable using. This will potentially limit the claim by the City of Ann Arbor that these bathrooms can provide a "safe and dignified" option for all, regardless of housing status. It would be strange to limit one of the key demographics for this program in such a way, considering the program is likely driven by a desire to better serve that exact group of people.

There will be another communication about the pilot program in May where the final accessibility details will be explained. Hopefully, we will get some clarity then on how everyone will or will not be able to take advantage of these new bathrooms in June.

Join the 12.21 Walk for the Homeless

ERICK BROWN
Groundcover vendor No. 617

On December 21st, the first day of winter and the longest night of the year, people across the country and around the world will participate in Homeless Remembrance Day, a time to honor and support the people who are experiencing homelessness.

In Ann Arbor, a local group of activists and volunteers will organize a walk for the homeless, starting and ending at the Bethlehem United Church of Christ, the home of the Groundcover News. The walk will begin at sundown, 5 p.m., and will last for about an hour, covering the shopping areas of downtown Main Street.

The walk is part of a 20+ year tradition that the Rock Club Foundation and I have been organizing every year. I am a survivor of a traumatic brain injury and a passionate advocate for people who are different or marginalized. I'm also known for traveling across the country with my pet goat, Deer, and organizing events such as Bicycle Day and Earth Day.

The walk aims to raise awareness and visibility for the rights and dignity of the homeless and to end discrimination against the poor. The organizers ask people to bring candles and a cup to give the candle a home, symbolizing the need for protection and warmth for everyone. They also ask people to bring signs or banners to speak up about the cause.

Discrimination against the poor is a serious human rights issue that affects millions of people around the world. It manifests in various forms, such as denying access to education, health care, housing, social protection and justice. It also fuels stigma, prejudice and violence against people living in poverty.

The organizers believe that poverty is not inevitable, but rather the result of unfair and unequal policies and practices that favor the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the poor and marginalized. They call for a just and inclusive economy that puts people and the planet at the center, and that respects the dignity and agency of everyone.

The organizers invite everyone who wants to participate in this event, even

if they are not able to join the walk in Ann Arbor. They encourage people to start or join a walk for the homeless in their cities, or to make posts on social media using the hashtag #1221 or #HomelessRemembranceDay. They also welcome donations and support for the Rock Club Foundation and Groundcover News, two organizations that work to empower and uplift the homeless community.

The Walk for the Homeless is a noble and compassionate initiative that deserves more attention and support. It is a way to remember the people who have died while living on the streets or in shelters and to show solidarity and empathy for the people who are still struggling. It is also a way to celebrate the resilience and strength of the human spirit, and to hope for a better future for everyone.

The organizers also want to share the meaning of 12/21, which is not only the date of the event but also a numerical pattern that can have different meanings depending on the context. For example, 12/21 is an hour mirror, a mathematical expression, and a

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TOOLS TO HELP

Winter STEAM

The Whittaker and Superior branches are hosting hands-on STEAM activities over the school break:

Dec. 26-28 & Jan 2-4: Superior
Dec. 26 & 28; Jan 2 & 4: Whittaker
Details at [ypsilibrary.org/events](https://www.ypsilibrary.org/events).

FEATURED EVENT
BOARD GAMES & VIDEO GAMES

January 6 | 3:30-5:30pm

YDL-Superior (1900 Harris Rd.)



Join our building monitors Chris & Drew for an afternoon of fun, games, and snacks. With board games and video games, you're sure to have a good time!

For kids ages 8 & up.

spiritual sign. Some people believe that seeing 12/21 repeatedly is a message from the universe or the angels, indicating harmony, optimism, idealism and family. These are the values that the Walk for the Homeless strives to promote and uphold.

If you are interested in joining or supporting the 1221 Walk for the Homeless, please contact the Rock Club Foundation on social media or visit their website.

Graci, Maralita!



AMANDA GALE
Groundcover vendor No. 573

Warning: This article contains explicitly Christian content. If you prefer not to read such articles, don't!

The holiday season can be a time both of great charity and benevolence, though also great scorn and injustice. Or perhaps it is just that the observable divide is just that much greater because “The Holidays” are supposed to be an occasion for our consciences to be even more understanding and giving than we’re already supposed to be doing 365 days/year.

The starkest contrast is when Christians are celebrating holidays with the themes of GOD’s great mercy, love and grace to humanity, exemplified by a GOD WHO HIMSELF became the evil within us (2 Corinthians 5:21), to suffer on our behalf the punishment we inherited and merited (Romans 5:12, Romans 3:23-24).

The proclamation and model for responsibility and privilege to charity, peace, mercy and benevolence for each other is exemplified by this GOD WHO would make HIMSELF HOMELESS at our rejection of HIM, and then nonetheless allow HIMSELF to SUFFER an also CRUEL and PAINFUL physical torture and death — all to redeem us.

However, how do “churchy” people live this out day to day — for the “least of these” (Matt 25.40) among us — the homeless, the unborn, children with cancer, people with diseases equivalent to the leprosy of JESUS’ time, for the marginalized, the behavior challenged, the hurting, the afraid and the just plain “worn out?”

Maralita found herself a pregnant teenager one year during the holidays. What had she done? The “churchy” people around her gacked and glared; she knew the corner conversations she’d pass by were about her when the people quickly turned away. The “churchy” people did NOTHING to find out her needs or come to her aid. Her situation got worse; her “boyfriend” dumped her — the child surely wasn’t his! Maralita then became homeless, traveling within her community, finally

wandering off to some relatives in another town, who oddly accepted her.

Maralita was young and fair; yet she wondered, could she ever build a LIFE for herself, after this? With her own “church” community scorning her, and very little previous employment experience, how would she ever get a reference for a job? She was heartbroken for her guy and where was GOD in all this? She knew in her heart from HIM and from the traditional teachings of her community, that she MUST have this child. And soon the child inside her would become all she had.

The church people could do something to help if they wanted to. Why didn’t they? With no place to go, no job, no friends, no family and no means — Maralita found herself one night giving birth in a dirty, old shed that thankfully someone or some family had long ago abandoned — just like she’d been abandoned. It hurt.

Was everyone around her so perfect? Why is there NO UNDERSTANDING, COMPASSION or AID, for a wayfaring young woman branded a transgressor because of The Gift she carried within her? Why is Maralita left to uncertainty for her and her child in the cold, “holiday” weather? Aren’t the churches the ones who are talking about warmth, love, joy, giving and forgiving? Where is it? Why don’t they ask, “What can we do that would be helpful?” Why is everywhere shut to those who most need it on “The Holidays” — the homeless and the alone? Where do they go for “The Holidays?”

Maralita was quite fortunate for being from the strict culture that she came from. Her boyfriend did return to her, to take care of her and her child. Though she and her family never completely regained the respect of that rigid, rules-based community, they were allowed to work and live in a fair amount of peace to themselves for years to come. What bothered Maralita and her family though, was realizing that there are so many homeless outcasts who experience shunning, rejection, no family and no means as she and her child had. Her child had to do something about that and grew up to be — among other things — a human rights advocate. And yet there’s still need in this world.

At this point we must ask: What if GOD did this — for us? What if GOD decided to suffer the scorn and ridicule and rejection that Maralita and her son did? What if GOD suffers with us, for us, and really CARES about us? Will that make a difference in how we approach LIFE and what we invest in it for and how we view others? Do we not see CHRIST and Mary in Maralita and her son? (Surely “Maralita” is the name for Mary in some language.)

If we realize that GOD loves us this much, how can we not actively SEEK how we can help others in the myriad of needs in our lost, fallen world. Are we “too good”? Do we care? Do we see CHRIST and Mary’s face, in the face of countless others around us — those in need whom we can help or those blessing our needs and talents? And when we realize ourselves as the stranded people whom GOD reached out to spare — dare we not have compassion on our fellow humans, and even animals?

What if we each decided to be selfless as Mary and Joseph were, greet and accept the unplanned child, sacrifice for each other in love, not forsaking each other and like the Child who grew up to offer HIMSELF for our redemption — made sure to LIVE on mission with HIM, in gratitude to HIM and identifying care with our fellow humans? How could we do this? Receive HIM. Believe HIM. Always be on mission with HIM.

Maybe exactly the real problem is that we regard ourselves as if we are not ourselves in need and outcasts (Revelation 3:17) before a HOLY GOD and in our relationships with others. We’re all too self-sufficient to be a part of JESUS’ group and doings. If we partook, it might just expose our self-reliance and towers of achievement. However, JESUS identifies it is also exactly HIM to whom we are empowering, refusing relating or rejecting.

And dare we complain about all that is “wrong with” our world, while we do nothing that is actually bettering it? Is mercy and grace spreading everywhere we go? If not, what is? As long as we live on this Earth — it’s NEVER TOO LATE to receive the grace we need, so that we can then give it to others (John 6:37). Really, we need fresh grace immersions daily for ourselves, so that our refreshing can then also bless others; we are and can only be as merciful to others to the extent we realize we are being shown mercy by a PERFECT GOD, WHO LOVES us, PERFECTLY.

Will more churches open up for “The Homeless” this winter? (Only a few in the WHOLE County have thus far; is this acceptable to JESUS?) Is there still no room for HIM at “The Inn” of our hearts and our churches and our country? Why aren’t more Christians actively involved for PRO-LIFE for EVERY LIFE in need of protection and mercy — from the womb to the tomb? Why are Christians not actively reaching out and being the connection — to a job (such as the gracious job wage giver in Matthew 10:1-15), a place of shelter, affordable housing, a warm cup of coffee with a friend, a caring, prayerful supportive network — to bring about victory at long last, from external oppositions or tough inner struggles. Meanwhile, real people are SUFFERING and DYING on the street corners in the most financially wealthy and most opportunity-blessed countries on this earth, while those with means and spiritual light content themselves by saying — “there’s an agency for that!”

One time when a woman was being scorned for anointing the adult JESUS with expensive perfume, (so seeking to preserve HIS body, after HIS crucifixion — possibly understanding HE would rise after HIS death and so to seek to preserve HIS body, for that) HE asked a very powerful question to her critics, “Do you see this woman?”

As we observe the Holy Family and their sacrificial giving, their identification with human poverty, their investment for the greatest good, and especially Mary’s special surrender to a really difficult life of social rejection, scorn, being misunderstood, outcast and not believed — for her and her son and family — shall we not feel a tug within us?

Graci, Maralita! For your great, humble acceptance to have your unplanned Child, who gave HIMSELF for us, and seeks to restore us and our world. And if Maralita with GOD’s help in her day could succeed for LIFE-GIVING in the midst of such great opposition and obstacles; will not we?



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Mercy House is the place to be on Christmas Day

It’s the Christmas season, and when you think of Christmas time you think of movies like “A Miracle on 34th Street,” “Charlie Brown’s Christmas,” “The Grinch,” “It’s a Wonderful Life” or “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” — all movies where the forces of good nature win out, with demonstrations of kind-heartedness towards someone and spreading happiness in the atmosphere.

When I think of Christmas, I think of the Christmas parties at the Mercy House on W. Huron St. down the street from the Delonis Center. They roll out the red carpet to spread Christmas cheer and genuine love to the homeless community.

Mercy House is a project of M.I.S.S.I.O.N., which is a non-profit started by Caleb Poirier and others like Brian Durrance, who are still involved. Mercy House itself is a hospitality house started by owner Peggy Lynch and Sheri Wander. For people who don’t know the background of Mercy House and/or M.I.S.S.I.O.N., they evolved from a project called Camp Take Notice which was a tent community governed by the homeless community who lived there. When Camp Take Notice was eliminated by the authorities, M.I.S.S.I.O.N. was formed to continue related work.

Peggy bought the house on W. Huron St. about 10 years ago. They serve meals there on Monday and Wednesday evenings and have a well-known Saturday breakfast. That breakfast all started from the spirit of Christmas.

One of Mercy House’s other projects is to host a large Christmas party for the homeless and recently housed. Anyone really is welcome, and I’m only saying this based on my personal experience.

Before founding Mercy House, Peggy Lynch visited Camp Take Notice (the tent community), invited by a friend. She simply fell in love with the community, the environment and just being among humans.

After being engaged with the community for one year, she decided to have a Christmas party at her personal residence. For her, it was nothing out of the normal to host an event like this. It was a big Christmas party; everyone from the tent community was invited. She asked different friends of hers in different faith groups to help out and they were very excited to.

At one of the Christmas parties before they had the house of hospitality, Peggy noticed a person named Steve going on the back deck crying. As a good party hostess, she wanted to know what was going on with Steve. He said he was completely



overwhelmed at the thought that he and other people from the camp community would be welcomed to someone’s house for a Christmas party. That response had a very big impact on her, being a mom and a grandma. When I interviewed Peggy, she said being a part of a community and making an impact in it was very powerful for her.

She and her friend Sonya started having Sunday dinner at Camp Take Notice every single week, inviting people from the faith communities to join them. This still happens to this day with the every-other-week meals at M.I.S.S.I.O.N.’s Purple House or Wheeler Park, which alternate with Washtenaw Camp Outreach at Wheeler and in other locations during the winter.

Living in a world where one thing leads to the next, Peggy said that when you’re a part of a community like this, you see where there is a gap. It could be someone who passed away and needs a proper burial, birthday celebration, wedding, someone who has a child and needs some clothes, someone pregnant and about to deliver and needs a baby shower to get necessary supplies, or just providing a space to observe, celebrate and become a tighter community together by bringing people together.

So with her genuine love for people, Peggy got more involved in helping what society considers the less fortunate or cast out, the homeless.

Peggy is a lawyer by occupation and because her heart was with the homeless community, she involved the wider community, including the corporation she works for. Peggy understood what being poor felt like, growing up very poor herself, going through college and getting married. Just like a lot of people in that situation, she tried hard to get out of it and became a workaholic. Although she was very successful in law and started her own law firm, she spent decades clawing her way out of poverty.

Then Peggy had an ‘aha’ moment where she felt she needed more in her life: she needed human relationships, she needed meaning. She started volunteering at numerous nonprofits.



Gracie Sheldon, David Williams, Peggy Lynch, Michael Clayvon, Walter Harris and Alonzo Young on the porch of Mercy House on W. Huron Street. Photo credit: Joe Woods.

During this time, she met Gracie, a woman who was at the Delonis Center and shared Peggy’s passion. Gracie wanted to be a blessing to other people and help them. Experiencing abuse at the Delonis Center, she still found it in her heart to help people in need, even the people who hurt her. Housed now, Gracie is a large part of Mercy House despite whatever struggles she goes through in life — internal or external.

The wider community within the homeless community is what helps people realize that no matter your background, we’re human and our job is to spread love and enjoy doing it. Talking to Cynthia Price, The editor of Groundcover News who has been involved with M.I.S.S.I.O.N. for a few years, I learned that Price has purchased small Christmas presents for the party for the last two years out of pocket — mostly because she always forgets to be reimbursed! It makes her feel happy to have direct contact with people and actually get in tune with people’s needs so they can tell her what they really need rather than what

someone else may think they need.

I chose this article, this organization and these people to interview in order to let Groundcover readers know that although Christmas is only celebrated once a year, M.I.S.S.I.O.N consistently helps less fortunate people celebrate other holidays and just being in a community because of the love they have for people. At Christmastime, with the help of Peggy and those who help her turn it up 100 notches — there is delicious food, gifts large and small, music and fun — and they do it unselfishly without seeking approval from their peers or boasting for their own self-satisfaction.

They generally do it in silence, but more and more people know via word-of-mouth about the party, which is attended by 400 people or so. As Peggy says, this is what we as a civilization should do more of — be a blessing to your fellow brother or sister, show love from the heart and don’t look at a person’s financial or social status as much as at their being a human who deserves happiness.



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A basketball Christmas

JOSHUA LEE
Groundcover contributor

As the NBA prepares to unwrap its 76th edition of Christmas Day games in the 2023-24 season, the hardwood spectacle transcends mere competition; it's a cherished tradition that showcases the best of basketball under the holiday lights. From humble beginnings in 1947, these Christmas Day matchups have evolved into a captivating saga, featuring iconic performances, intense rivalries and unforgettable moments.

Christmas games were more regional affairs in the early years, reflecting the league's grassroots connection with communities. The Chicago Stags faced off against the Providence Steamrollers in 1947. Reflecting on those times, former NBA Commissioner David Stern reminisces, "It was a way for the league to connect with fans, bringing the joy of basketball into homes during the holiday festivities."

The NBA's Christmas Day contests have become a showcase for greatness, featuring legendary players leaving an indelible mark on the holiday hardwood. Wilt "The Stilt" Chamberlain's historic 1961 performance stands just as tall as the athletic giant himself, scoring 59 points and grabbing 36 rebounds in a double-overtime battle against the New York Knicks. Wilt's dominance remains a Christmas record to this day, a testament to his unparalleled skills on the court.

The 1984 matchup between the New York Knicks and the New Jersey Nets etched Bernard King into Christmas

Day lore. King's sensational 60-point performance, the highest ever on this festive occasion, illuminated the court even in a losing effort. His scoring spree joined the ranks of Chamberlain and Rick Barry, creating a trinity of 50-point Christmas Day legends.

Rivalries have added a layer of intensity to the holiday matchups. The 1995 Christmas Day game marked a Finals rematch between the Orlando Magic and the Houston Rockets. Penny Hardaway's clutch shot secured a narrow 92-90 victory for the Magic, showcasing the competitive spirit between star centers Shaquille O'Neal and Hakeem "The Dream" Olajuwon.

The 2004 Christmas clash between the Miami Heat and the Los Angeles Lakers brought the long-awaited faceoff between ex-superstar duo Shaquille O'Neal and the late Kobe Bryant. The game lived up to expectations, with the Heat securing a ruthless 104-102 victory in a forced overtime situation, extending their scorching hot win streak to 11 games. O'Neal and



Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant.

Bryant's duel added a dramatic chapter to the ongoing narrative of Christmas Day greatness.

The 2016 matchup between the Lebron "King" James and the Kyrie "Uncle Drew" Irving-led Cleveland Cavaliers and the five all-star Kevin Durant Death lineup Golden State Warriors was more than a game; it was a Christmas Day thriller between two super team behemoths.

Down 14 points in the fourth quarter, the Cavaliers rallied to a 109-108 victory, capped by Kyrie Irving's baseline drive into a fully contested spin move fadeaway for the game. Not to mention Uncle Drew's assassin-like game-winner was fully contested by elite shooting guard Klay Thompson who is highly decorated with multiple first-team all-defense selections. The heated rivalry between these two legendary teams turned Christmas Day into an unforgettable stage for epic comebacks and high-leverage moments.

In 2017, the Warriors and the Cavaliers continued their holiday rendezvous in a thrilling contest. The game featured a late-game surge by the Cavs, tying the score with an 11-2 run. However, Klay Thompson's clutch three-pointer with 1:33 left shifted the spotlight back to the Warriors, sealing their victory in another Christmas Day spectacle.

Adding a touch of whimsy to the holiday spectacle, the NBA's iconic Christmas commercials have become an integral part of the tradition. The most famous commercial, featuring hoops adorned with bells with players synchronizing their shots to the tune of "Jingle Bells," has become a nostalgic symbol of the season. The melding of sport and holiday cheer in these

commercials has resonated with fans, becoming a cherished component of the NBA's Christmas Day festivities.

While the games on Christmas Day provide exhilarating moments on the court, they also serve as a canvas for off-court festivities. Since 2009, Christmas Day broadcasts have featured a musical interlude, with Mariah Carey's iconic renditions of holiday classics becoming synonymous with NBA Christmas celebrations.



Mariah Carey

As most businesses and entertainment sources take Christmas off, the NBA's Christmas Day games have been solidified as a cornerstone of holiday sports entertainment. The rivalry-procured matchups continue to blend athletic prowess with the festive spirit, creating a unique and cherished tradition that resonates with basketball fans worldwide. As the 2023-24 season approaches, anticipation builds for the next chapter in the saga of NBA Christmas Day basketball, where the echoes of the past merge with the promise of new moments that will be etched into the annals of the sport's history.

Michigan vs. Everybody

In the summer of 2023, I predicted the Michigan Wolverines, my favorite football team, would win the national college football championship. I was not the only person who made this prediction. Many other Michigan football fans, hopeful like myself, wished to see our Wolverines take it to another level. We must, in order to win the college football playoff game against our nemesis, the SEC Champion Alabama Crimson Tide.

Alabama is the next level. We beat Ohio State three years in a row, but we have yet to defeat the Crimson Tide in recent history. There is a saying: "To be the best you must first beat the best." The last time the two teams met was in the 2020 Citrus Bowl when Alabama beat the Wolverines 35-16.



MIKE JONES
Groundcover vendor No. 113

three-game suspension at the end of the regular season for allegedly using video to steal other teams' play signals, will lead the Wolverines into this epic battle: the College Football Playoffs.

A four-team playoff system leaves the 13-0 number two Washington Huskies to meet up against the 12-1 number three Texas Longhorns in the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 1. The winners of those two games will face off against one another in Houston for the national title on January 8. Go Blue!!!

Fun Facts: Michigan is ranked No.1 in the Associated Press college football poll for the first time since it won its last national championship in 1997.

This Rose Bowl game will be the sixth meeting between Michigan and



Alabama.

Alabama leads the all-time series against Michigan, 3-2.

Michigan and Alabama are the two winningest football programs in the nation.

I'm dreaming of a colorful Christmas



DENISE SHEARER
Groundcover vendor No. 485

I love everything about the winter holidays except for winter, ice and snow. I love everything about the winter holidays except for the homeless and hungry people suffering. I love the winter holidays because it's a celebration of Jesus. I love to see adults and kids laughing and happy.

It's a time when people are nice and give each other presents. It's also a time when good food is shared between friends and family. It's a time when people who usually don't get to see each other much spend time together. It's a time for adults and children to get the presents they always wanted. It's a time when kids get toys for Christmas; adults like toys, too.

My favorite colors are green, purple and yellow, and I think those are Christmas colors. I love

the colorful clothes people wear. The kids' toys are colorful and the adult toys are colorful, too. I love colorful Christmas decorations and decorating the inside and outside of buildings with pretty colors.

Christmas music is beautiful, too. It sounds so good, fun and relaxing. My favorite Christmas songs are "I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas," "Santa Baby" and both versions of "Joy to the World." This is a sad but funny song — he says he's getting nuttin' for Christmas because he's been nothing but bad — I don't know what the name is. I like the song "Silver Bells," too.

Another thing I like about the winter holidays is that churches have special things. Full Circle, Fresh Start and Groundcover do nice and special things for people, too. Peace House, Mercy House, Delonis and all the places people gather do special things for Christmas and winter holidays.

The Christmas holidays are a time to celebrate God and Jesus, whether you get what you want or not. I think the winter Christmas holidays are all about love and Jesus' birthday. I think it is a joyful, loving time no matter what present you get.

Evolution of my Christmas



JAMIE CAMERON
Groundcover vendor No. 612

Christian variety (gifts, goodwill, birth of Christ and the family Church Mass.)

As an adult, my celebration depended on how much money I had, buying gift cards as presents and getting together with family most of the time.

As I'm growing older, and my disabilities are likewise growing and I have no income, it's more about love, family and what I can create — helping to trim the tree, assisting in wrapping presents, creating my gifts, dining and spending time with family.

A few resolutions can't hurt, either. As I'm doing daily reading of the entire Bible, I'm keeping Christ in mind as my top priority.

Merry Christmas and happy holidays! You matter, and thanks to all of our supporters!

Cold winds in America

PHILLIP SPINK
Groundcover contributor

It is absurd callousness,
A bleak ostracization,
That there is not reliably at least a bed in a dormitory
Closely available for every homeless person in our nation.

We say we are kind, with some perhaps thinking
that by denying people beds
And at times leaving them in cold torment and peril
We are only doing what we must
To encourage all to look for work.
But I think we are more deep-set on being punishers
Than conscious thought admits,
Of those seen as shiftless,
Or daring to be different dancers.

People can seldom be pained into working:
Certainly not when they are touched by insanity,
And still more not when they have chosen
To be drifters in the wind,
Whose fealty to dust, and sky, and wandering,
Likely irks many souls more dully settled in place.

We choose to believe that the homeless are spirits in dissolution,
Yet it is likely to some extent jealousy—
Discontent within our cages—
That turns us meanly judgemental.

Theorizing away compassion
Our boards and committees building newfangled shelters,
Often with a quite small number of beds for hundreds in need.
Even those caring most can be drawn in,
Turning their heads towards a temperate face of the same dark ignorance
Which keeps people passing cups, and hats, and cardboard signs of Veterans,
Without the drop of a dollar or dime,
Or even a moment of time for kind pleasantries.

It sometimes seems as though through some strange reversal of reason,
We feel we will be damned
If we do not struggle to ignore and to keep
Those not within some condoned and stamped parameter
In misery.

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Sunday Worship Time
10:00 am In-person
and via Live Stream and Radio Broadcast

Jesus didn't turn people away
Neither Do We. United Church of Christ

The Houseplant (a profile)

Date pudding



KEN PARKS
Groundcover vendor No. 490

This is a favorite of the Parks, enjoyed at all major family holidays and birthday celebrations!

Pudding:

- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup flour
- 1 tbsp butter
- ½ cup milk
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 ½ cups pitted dates
- ½ cup chopped walnuts or pecans

Syrup:

- 1 cup brown sugar



- 1 ½ cup boiling water
- 1 Tbsp butter
- 1 Tbsp vanilla

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
Mix together all pudding ingredients except nutmeats and put into a buttered baking dish. Sprinkle nuts over the top.
Mix syrup ingredients together. Pour the syrup over the batter and bake for 30 min. Serve with whipped cream. Raisins may be used instead of dates.

Potato candy



ERICK BROWN
Groundcover vendor No. 617

Potato candy is a simple and delicious treat that my mom used to make when I was growing up.

Ingredients:

- 1 small potato, peeled and cooked
- 4-5 cups of powdered sugar
- 1/4 cup of creamy peanut butter
- A pinch of salt
- A dash of vanilla extract (optional)

Directions:

Mash the potato in a large bowl until smooth and lump-free.
Add 2 cups of powdered sugar and mix well. The mixture will be sticky at this point. Add more powdered sugar, one cup at a time, until the mixture is thick and stiff, like cookie dough.



Sprinkle some powdered sugar on a large sheet of wax paper and transfer the dough onto it.
Roll out the dough into a thin rectangle, about 1/4 inch thick.
Spread the peanut butter evenly over the dough, leaving a small border around the edges.
Starting from one of the long sides, roll up the dough tightly, using the wax paper to help you.
Wrap the log in wax paper and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or until firm.
Cut into thin slices and enjoy!
This recipe makes about three dozen pieces of potato candy. You can store them in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a week. I hope you like this recipe and have a sweet day!

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

7	1	6	9	5	4	8	3	2
5	3	2	8	6	7	9	4	1
4	8	9	2	3	1	6	7	5
6	4	3	5	7	9	1	2	8
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